Interview with former PhM2c William S. Pace, present at Cape Gloucester and Peleliu. Conducted by Jan K. Herman, Historian, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, 4 Dec 1996.

Where are you from?

I was born in Excelsior, WV, January 23, 1924 and moved to Washington, DC, when I was 6 months old. I'm a Washingtonian, one of the rare ones, I guess. I went to elementary school in Washington, and Eastern High School. I went to work because my dad got killed when I was 16 and when I turned 18 I started working with the District government. I enlisted in the Navy in October 26, 1942 to beat the draft.

Where did you enlist?

I enlisted in Washington, DC, and then went to Great Lakes, IL, and stayed there for 30 days for boot training.

What did the boot training consist of?

It was a crash course of 4 weeks, that included Navy indoctrination, organization, swimming qualifications, marching and close-order drilling, dress code, and a short review of the Navy manual. They also tested our educational qualifications and decided what school we would be placed in. I was selected to be a hospital corpsman.

After boot training, I got a 10-day boot leave, came home, and then went to San Diego Naval Hospital. I spent about 6 months there then got transferred to the Marine Corps. I did my Hospital Corps training there at Balboa Park Hospital Corps school.

What do you remember about the training you had at the hospital?

Training encompassed anatomy and physiology, minor surgery and first aid, bandaging, materia medica, nursing, hygiene and sanitation, and hospital administration. After we graduated, we were assigned to specific duty, i.e., ward corpsman, diet kitchen, pharmacy, x-ray tech, lab tech, operating room, clerical, and many other duties. My assignment was in the diet kitchen serving 178 Marine patients who had come back from Guadalcanal.

What shape were they in?

They had a little bit of everything from wounds to elephantiasis and malaria. I had a hundred or so bed patients. I would deliver them chow from the diet kitchen.

How did you end up with the Marines?

After serving 4 weeks in the hospital, a draft appeared on the bulletin board indicating that the following "lucky" men were being assigned to the Fleet Marine Force at Camp Elliott, San Diego. I was one of the "lucky" ones.

I spent the next 6 weeks at the Field Medical School. I took the following courses and learned to put them in the perspective of combat field operations:

Chemical warfare, Marine organization, medical field tactics, hygiene and sanitation, military first aid, and field medical equipment. This was another accelerated course, normally a 3- to 6-month course. Here again we were subjected to a "Hurry up, we want you to have a vague idea of what war is like before we send you to the slaughter. This ended the book training. Now we were ready for field tactics.

What else did you learn there?

By this time, I was assigned to the 20th Replacement Battalion and they began preparing us to go overseas and join a fighting Marine division. We had about 4 weeks to get into fighting shape and get accustomed to battlefield conditions as nearly as possible.

This training began at 5:00 a.m. with a 3- or 5-mile hike. The obstacle course was the clincher. Beginning at 8:00 a.m., with the temperature around 90 degrees, we began the infiltration course. For 3 or 4 hours you would go under barbed wire while they were shooting machine guns over the top of your head just to get you acclimated to the noise if nothing else. This was supposed to teach you to keep your head down low and try to get through without getting hit.

Five and ten-mile hikes strengthened your legs and built up the body as did double timing every time you were within a mile of camp.

You also learned weapons.

Yes. The finale was the rifle range. We learned to use the M1 rifle and the .45 caliber pistol, which was the weapon field hospital corpsmen were issued. I'm an expert with a rifle but not much with a pistol. But I learned to shoot the pistol offhand. When we were at Camp Elliott, we were shooting on the range, about 140 or 150 of us. One day we were out there firing the M1 rifle. I think we had about 50 of us on the range. After we fired for awhile, the range officer blew his whistle and stopped us. He said, "You guys from here down come over here, I want to talk to you. You seven guys right here," and that included me and six fellows on my left side. "I want you guys to get behind these fellas and watch. I want you seven guys to shoot five rounds." Boom, bulls eye. Boom, bulls eye. All of us had bulls eyes. Then he started down at one end and said, "Where are you from?" And he said Tennessee and the next one said Kentucky. When he got to me he asked me where I was born and I said West Virginia. Then he said, "The rest of you damned guys got to learn one thing. If you get into any trouble you want to stay behind one of these boys because they can hit anything they can see."

And you also learned the carbine.

Yes. A carbine was given to me in a unique situation. I believe it was Cape Gloucester. A fellow Marine had appendicitis and so we transferred him to a hospital ship. He said, "Doc, you know that pistol of yours is not good enough to protect you. Take my carbine." And he handed it to me and it was an excellent gun. I could really shoot it. It had the old flip sight; they didn't yet have the ramp sight. I took that carbine and kept it through Peleliu and then turned it back in when I went back to the Navy. I used it two or three times.

The final training to prepare us for combat which was begun just about 90 days before a mission. This included hikes up to 25 miles, firing ranges, machine gun training, learning how to throw grenades and sticks of dynamite, infiltration drills, and ship to shore maneuvers. We did a lot of bandaging, and practicing IV's on each other.

When you learned how to do IV's, did you practice on each other?

Yes. Just before Cape Gloucester, we had some new boys come in. This one kid stuck the needle all the way through my vein, all the way into the muscle. I said, "Just back up a little bit. Pull it out easy, and don't stick it back again." There's a technique you use. You go in and go over the top of the vein and then go into it. That's the way you get your IV done without too much difficulty. I imagine I could still do it if I had to.

So, you had a lot of practice. What kind of fluids would you be using with IV's?

Mostly plasma. But we usually practiced with a dry needle. You'd hit the vein, withdraw the needle and the blood just starts coming up in the syringe and then you'd just pull it out again. In those days you didn't have to worry about HIV and things like that. You could operate without gloves or anything else, and we did. In combat, you just took your canteen and washed the blood off, and start doing whatever you were doing again. The idea of getting it done was what you had practiced and you could do it automatically rather than having to worry about catching HIV or other diseases. You'd bandage him up, put a tourniquet on if you had to, and then try to get him behind a tree if you could. In those instances you don't even think about blood.

In combat, would they have provided you with plasma?

No. The front line corpsmen didn't have plasma. All we had were bandages, morphine, iodine, sulfadiazine ointment, etc. The battalion aid station on the beach was the only place you could get plasma on the island.

Then, you needed the IV skills for working in a battalion aid station.

Yes.

Once you ended up with the Marines, there was no distinction. You essentially became a Marine.

I was a Marine period, assigned to the first Engineer Battalion. We had a doctor, a chief, and each company had two corpsmen. I was one of the company corpsmen.

Did they treat you with any deference because you were a doc?

Doc was someone you protected because if you didn't protect doc he wasn't going to protect you. Anything the hospital corpsman wanted he got. All you had to do was ask for it. You were like a counselor to them as well. I'll tell you this one story that stayed with me for many years. A sergeant came to me and said, "Doc, my wife just gave birth to a baby girl. I've been away for 26 months. I said, "Do you love her?" He said yes. I said, "Don't you think she is as human as you were when you were in Melbourne? That girl you were with was pregnant too, wasn't she?" He said, "You know, Doc, you're right." I said, "If you love your wife and the two kids you have at home, write a letter and tell her." About 5 weeks later, he came to me and said, "Doc, I've got to talk to you. He had a letter in his hand and he's smiling. "Read this letter." So I looked at it. And then he said, "She loves me and I love her and I told her that it doesn't matter. I just don't know what to say to you." The first man killed on Peleliu was the sergeant. He got shot in the neck with a .40 caliber slug and was killed instantly.

The same guy?

The same guy. But at least he left his family knowing that he loved them. Regardless of what he or she had done, all was forgiven. He thanked me for that. But what does a 20-year-old boy know about life? I just tried to be practical about it, that's all I could do.

Men came to me with all kinds of problems.

How did you get overseas?

On one of those conversion type ships, the SS Mor Macren. It took 31 days to go from San Diego to Melbourne, Australia. This was in June and July of 1943. I was seasick for the entire trip drinking water and eating plenty of candy bars. I lost about 15 pounds and was sure happy to be on land again. I joined "C" Company, 17th Marines, 1st Battalion, Combat Engineers at Mount Martha. The Division was sent to Melbourne to rest and recuperate. An engineer battalion's duties in combat consisted of mine-sweeping, flame-throwers, demolition work. We immediately began field combat training exercises.

So the replacement battalion you got into before you left San Diego, was incorporated into where it was needed once you got to Australia.

Yes. There was about 40 percent of the division in the hospital or in rest camps with malaria. They were in pretty bad shape. Once we started getting the replacements in they started rebuilding the division to get ready to go to Cape Gloucester.

After about 4 to 6 weeks of field combat training, we set sail for Goodenough Island for further training.

We arrived at Goodenough and set up camp where I was introduced to air bombing techniques of the Japanese. It was very scary but sometimes it was like being at a football game rooting for our anti aircraft gunners to shoot the Jap planes down that were in the searchlight beams. Our main duty was to construct a rear evacuation hospital for the 6th Army. We cleared roads and constructed buildings--wooden frames with corrugated metal roofs.

One day one of the boys was wounded so I was taking my pack out to find some bandages and maybe some iodine. I reached in and took out a morphine syrette, when an Army doctor came by. He said, "What the hell are you doing with morphine?"

And I said, "I'm a Navy hospital corpsman. We're all trained to use morphine. We use it to combat shock."

"Oh, I did hear that you boys got more extensive training than our medics."

Our training at Goodenough consisted of flame thrower exercises, demolition work with nitro and gelignite explosives, hiking, bayonet drills, other close order combat training, and more machine gun training. I learned to shoot them all, take them apart, and do most anything. Whatever the Marines would do I would do. I felt you never knew when the guy standing beside you could get killed and if his gun was available you needed to know how to use it. So I made myself learn everything--.30 caliber machine gun, .50 caliber machine gun, BAR--I could shoot them all.

Then, this was all things you did on your own. They didn't tell you to learn these weapons.

No, on my own volition.

How did you get from Goodenough Island to Cape Gloucester?

We first went to Oro Bay in New Guinea, where we stayed for a couple of weeks. It was a stepping stone to prepare for the new mission at Cape Gloucester. We were bombed every night and experienced some daytime strafing. And we continued our training. Then we boarded an LCI to go into Cape Gloucester. We were on one of the first LCIs to hit the beach on December 26, 1944.

What kind of a day was it?

It was a bright day and after we hit the beach our B-25s decided to come in and... Some of them had a 75 mm cannon in the nose. While they were strafing, they were firing the cannon as well. But the trouble is nobody told them that the enemy troops were up there and not back where we were so we had to get behind the trees and let them come through.

Was there a lot of enemy fire?

Not a great deal, just sporadic sniper fire. They had told us that once we got in we would find a main road right at the beach. There wasn't any main road where we hit, just swamp. We had to move from one area to another to try to get back together as a group. When we did, a sniper would open up and then everyone scattered. You didn't stand and wait around.

They were in the treetops?

Yes, they were in the trees shooting at anything that moved.

Cape Gloucester was jungle terrain, hot and humid.

Yes. It was hot and humid with rain every day. You were soaking wet and a half-hour later you were dry.

Did you have any medical problems to take care of?

Yes, we ran into wounded and had to treat them but until we started the attack on Hill 660, mainly our job was bulldozing and making roads because we were engineers. So I would be with a bulldozer operator while he was cutting a road. In one instance, this Marine was running a bulldozer and the Marines were attacking. He was pushing the dirt down into a creek so the boys could get over to the other side. The Japs were on the other side of the creek dug in in foxholes. Suddenly he said, "Doc, I'm hit." I said, "Where?" He replied, "In my mouth." The bullet went right through here, hit his teeth and blistered both lips. I put some sulfadiazine ointment on his lips. He got a purple heart for that but also got a silver star for making a path across that creek under fire so the infantry could get across.

Did he lose his teeth?

No. The bullet just cracked a tooth. He was very lucky. His name was Corporal Caputo.

After we secured that situation we got involved with Hill 660. That was on the beach side. They had us engineers go in and sweep a sandy creek bed for mines. There was a platoon of seven of us, and I was attached to it. Tanks, a half-track, and infantry were waiting for our decision as to whether the stream bed was clear of mines. We then proceeded across the stream and up the bank entering the woods in front of the infantry. We had gone no further than about 10 yards in the woods when all hell broke out pinning us down with a murderous fire from all sides. We managed to get into some Jap foxholes on their side of the creek in the nick of time.

You had an encounter with a sniper, didn't you?

Yes, when we got in those foxholes and were pinned down, bullets were flying everywhere. I was behind a big tree in a foxhole. And all of a sudden something fell down in front of me like a piece of bark. A sniper was trying to find the range on my head. I looked up over my head and you could see where three bullets had hit the tree about 12 inches above my head. A corporal we called "Panama," said, "What's the matter, Doc?" "There's a Jap sniper shooting at me." He bounced into my foxhole and said, "Where?" "Look at that tree over there,"

I answered. "Now watch," I said. And a head popped up and both of us fired at him, I with my carbine and he with a Thompson submachine gun. The sniper never fired back. He was tied in the tree so he fell only half way down. You could see that he wasn't going to shoot anybody anymore. I was deaf for about two and a half weeks after that. The flash from the corporal's Thompson submachine gun was right next to my ear. Today, I cannot hear some sounds high or low and some medium sounds.

We were pinned down for about 40 or 50 minutes, perhaps an hour at the most. An artillery spotter landed beside me and he said, "Fire one," and they fired. Then he said, "You see where that landed, Doc?" I said, "Yes, out in the water about 50 or 60 yards away." Then he radioed the 11th Marines and said, "Bring it in 50 and over 50 to the right." And they fired again. And it hit in the top of the trees and all that shrapnel came back. Then he said, "Do you see where that one hit, Doc?" I said, "Hell no. I didn't look and I'm not going to." Then he said, "Bring it back 50 and in 50 and fire for effect." And boy, I'm telling you those guys fired those guns like they were automatic cannons. If you had 10 or 15 of those cannons in line, when the last one went off the first one went off and was just like boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. They just kept it up.

Then a fellow named Capt. Buckley in a half-track came flying through there. The half-track had a 75 mm cannon on it as well as a .50 caliber machine gun. When he turned that thing around and fired point blank into the Jap position, he just tore the line apart. Our tanks and supporting infantry then began moving up to engage the enemy until they were destroyed. And that took care of that.

That pretty much ended the combat there at Cape Gloucester in about January of '44. This experience will never be erased from my mind. It's seldom told but was re-lived in my dreams for many years after the war.

When you were at Cape Gloucester during the fighting, did you treat any other wounded besides the fellow with the mouth wound?

Gunshot wounds and things like that. I'd bandage them up and then they would ship them by stretcher-bearers to the beach and then to a hospital ship. Almost in every instance, there was a hospital ship nearby.

After that combat, one of our corpsmen in A Company at Talasea, New Britain, was relieved of duty and I was sent to relieve him. Most of the action there consisted of bombing at night. There were hot volcanic waters and taking showers was refreshing.

Did you go to Pavuvu after Cape Gloucester?

Yes. We went to the rest area at Pavuvu.

Describe Pavuvu.

It was a group of little islands in the Russells. I believe Palmolive Pete owned Pavuvu. It was nothing but coconut palms, all well planted. They had a slaughter house at one end. There was a saw mill island, which I did some independent duty on. It was a pretty good saw mill, and we used the lumber in the bivouac area to build wooden floors in the tents and little cupboards at the head of the bunks.

We also tried to make a company street by hauling coral from the beach in buckets, and we made a baseball field from coral. I was a pitcher. We had a game with the 1st Marines and so I ended up going in in the second inning, bases loaded no outs and the score one to nothing

against us. We beat them 2-1 in the tenth inning. The 1st Marines had two boys from the Chicago White Sox and I struck them both out twice.

Did you have malaria to deal with there?

Yes. That was an everyday affair. At dinner time, you opened up and I threw an atabrine in your mouth and you had better swallow it. You had to do it that way. All you had to do was go out to the garbage dump where the men dumped their garbage at the end of their meals, and it would be filled with atabrine. It was a dye that could dye your skin and eyes yellow. So, I made them open their mouths, threw it in, and watched while they swallowed the pill.

Isn't atabrine terribly bitter?

As bitter as gall. One of the boys said one time, "I never see you take one Doc." I said, "You take one and I'll chew one up." He said, "You chew it up first. I don't believe you." So I put it in my mouth and chewed it up and didn't even change my expression, but oh was that bitter! And then he took his. Yet, even though the boys were on antimalarial drugs we still had malaria. We also used a lot of Japanese medication in bottles that we had captured--quinine. As a matter of fact, I threw out the last quinine that I had from Cape Gloucester about 6 months ago. I should have kept it.

What other medical problems did the jungle environment cause?

A lot of dysentery. And in the tropics, a little scratch would get infected and ulcer right to the bone. At first, we would try to put sulfa powder on the wound but what would happen when you put sulfa on it and bandage it up, the skin would heal on the topside but would still ulcerate on the bottom. So we began using sodium borate powder and sulfadiazine ointment instead and that stopped the wounds from ulcerating underneath.

How did the jungle treat your equipment?

It was wet all the time. You had to clean your weapons every 3 or 4 days and re-oil them. Anything that stayed in your tent would get mouldy. You had to wash and hang them up and let the sun sort of bleach them and dry them out so they would smell half-way decent.

Were you able to replenish supplies easily?

We had no problem getting supplies. Some food was tough to get. We ate a lot of C-rations, and powdered eggs for breakfast.

As I understand it, Pavuvu was the last place on earth you would want a rest camp. It was damp, dirty, it was a jungle environment.

It was indeed a jungle environment but also in the jungle environment was a lot of snakes and things. And some of those snakes were 7 or 8 feet long. There is a picture on page 249 of The Old Breed showing the 1st Marine Division at Pavuvu swimming. You'll notice that all the boys are naked. One day, a B-25 came in with Una Merkle (a movie star), Gary Cooper, and Jerry Colonna. She was flying in this plane and it was coming in right across this beach. She gave a show to the boys that night in which she said, "Fellas, I want to tell you something. I saw something today the girls back home would give their right arm to see. Remember that B-25 that was skimming the beach today? I was in it." The guys went wild.

Just before we went to Peleliu, Bob Hope found out that we had seen no shows and were going into combat. So he got five Piper Cubs and flew over and landed at Pavuvu and gave us a show. He was a nut, flying in that Piper Cub, hanging out the door, hollering at everybody and all he had was a belt on. He looked like he could have fallen out of the plane. If you look at Bob Hope's memoirs that came out about 3 or 4 months ago, he mentions that he landed at Pavuvu. To my estimation, that man deserves any medals he gets and all the tribute the boys can give him. His visit lifted our morale 100 percent.

We boarded the President Adams, a transport which took us from Pavuvu to Peleliu.

Did you know where you were going?

They told us about a week later and we landed on the 15th of September. They broke out a facsimile of the island and showed us where we were going to land and so forth.

What do you recall about going ashore at Peleliu?

The pre-landing fireworks illuminating the sky was a sight to behold. Just before we began boarding the landing craft, an empty feeling began to grab at your guts, fear gripped each man, eyes showing strain beyond comprehension as you stared through the smoke and mist. We went down the cargo nets down the side of the ship into Higgins boats--LCVPs--and then from there transferred into the "alligators." These were tracked vehicles. As we started in with those, you can't imagine. It was like every Fourth of July you'd ever seen in your life rolled into one. Shells exploding--coming in, going out. The whole sky was lit up. And boats were getting hit.

Then, you saw these other boats getting hit?

We could see things burning as we went by them but you don't look up and look out. Only the coxswain driving the boat looks out. You keep your head down because bullets are flying all around going every which way. As we went by you could see the smoke.

How far from the beach were you?

About 200 yards. We were in the first part of the second wave and as we neared the beach, the beachmaster was waving us off, telling us to get back out. But we were already committed and couldn't stop. And then this Navy guy said "Get your a.. out of here real quick because they've hit the one in front of us and the one behind us. Get out so I can get out of here."

So I jumped out in about a foot and a half of water. The approach to the beach was littered with burning vehicles, amtracks, ducks, etc. The two alligators in front of us and the one behind were hit by mortar fire and were burning. There was no explanation at the time why we were spared.

The beach was strewn with dead bodies, and we found the entire first and second waves had scarcely moved inland more than 50 yards. Enemy fire was being pin-pointed at every target with uncanny accuracy. The Japanese had everything marked with cross pieces of steel with a different colored ribbon on each of them so that maybe 100 yards was red, 75 yards was green, etc. It was all prearranged and premarked so they could readily determine the range. Why we managed to get in unhit while the alligator in front of us and another behind us was hit is unexplainable. It could be that the Japs had to go to a different pile to pick up a mortar shell.

When we got to the beach, we went in just about 20 yards or so and ran into a tank trap they had built which was about as deep as this room. The walls went straight down so that if a

tank would nose in, they would have it zeroed in and blown it apart. But we had some equipment that could push the sand in and made a couple of holes so we could get down in it.

Then we moved over to the left flank and stayed there most of the afternoon and evening. The firing was just tremendous. It kept going all day long. As you went in about 20 or 30 feet, the Japanese had fixed the sand making a path going this way or that way. They had their guns zeroed in on those paths and if you moved up any of those paths that was it. You'd see 10 or 15 guys lying dead in those paths. The whole beach was the same way--bodies like you just can't believe.

There were five corpsmen in my company, a doctor and chief were in H&S company. We had approximately 23 corpsmen in the 1st Engineer Battalion. That first day our division was reduced by 40 percent. Our boys in the companies were detached by squads. In other words, we might have two engineers assigned in an infantry squad for demolition work and to be sure that the flame-throwers were working properly and whatever. The hospital corpsmen, at that point, were left with a headquarters outfit.

Did you get a chance to fire back?

Yes. On the first night at Peleliu we were asked to help assist on the left flank. There was a hill, a little ridge if you like, and a company of infantry from the 1st Marines. Of the 215 men, only about 10 or 15 were left. They decided to stay, so about 40 A-Co engineers were sent to assist them.

Meanwhile, the Japanese were trying to come around on the water side. Everybody was firing at them, including me. In a night both long and full of fear, blood, guts, and just pure damned determination not to be kicked off the island, saved the beach head.

The next morning there were two of us left. Two out of the five corpsmen. Two of the others were wounded and the other had heat prostration and passed out so they sent him back. One boy from Missouri got hit right in the forearm but it pierced an artery. When I reached in to check it the blood shot practically 6 feet. So I bandaged him up and told him to get back because you don't fool with an artery type wound.

We regrouped and moved up on the first ridge and one of our young corpsmen came up to me screaming for a stretcher-bearer and plasma. He said the sergeant was shot. I looked down and saw that the sergeant had been hit in the neck. I told him the sergeant was dead and the corpsman kept screaming out of his mind. I grabbed him and slapped his face. He was in shock and I sent him to the rear.

What was the beach sand like?

When we got out of the water they had about maybe 25 or 30 feet of sand before the coral started. And the sand was so white, extremely white, very fine. The water was also very beautiful as well. There were beautiful beaches all around the island.

What did you carry ashore for the Peleliu landing? What did your medical kit look like?

We had a first aid kit that was elongated with metal buttons on the side so you could let the bottom out and expand it. It was about 12 to 14 inches wide and about 20 inches long. It had a canvas strap to go across your shoulder. You could pull it aside to carry it behind you or you could snap it onto your belt. Unexpanded, it was 8 x 12 but if you were in combat it was expandable. You would have all your bandages, shears, hemostats, etc.

Did your medical kit have a red cross on it?

The combat corpsman never had any medical equipment that had a red cross on it or wore a white arm band. They were bulls eyes for the Japs. And they would rather kill a corpsman than they would a first lieutenant. If you knock out a corpsman and you have two corpsmen for 235 men, what have you done? You have almost devastated that company. With only one corpsman left... That's why we not only dressed like Marines, we walked like Marines, we talked like Marines, and I still have the language that I shouldn't use. Remember the white arm bands with the red cross they wanted us to wear in combat? That was the most idiotic thing I ever saw in my life. I never even took mine ashore with me. It stayed aboard ship somewhere. You can't afford to lose a corpsman because of some stupid advertising on his gear.

What other gear did you carry?

You had a military belt--a pistol belt with two hooks that snapped together. On one side you had a pack that could hold two extra ammo clips. Then you had your .45 on the right-hand side. I tied my holster down to my leg below my knee because it always flopped around. The holster had a flap. I changed that flap so my thumb could open the flap and pull the gun out with one motion like a fast draw. You also had a pack in the back--just a top pack, not a bottom pack--and that would hold a pair of clean socks and maybe a set of skivvies, or some extra first aid gear. Alongside of it, there was enough room so you could hook in a machete. We had a medical machete, not the long type. This was a short machete about 18 to 24 inches long. You would keep it real sharp because that's what you used... You might take a limb and cut it off and use it for a leg splint, or to brace an arm with. That machete was just like an axe. It could cut anything. My Kabar knife was in my left rear pocket. You never carried a Kabar in the front because if you landed on it, it could go right through that leather sheath and injure you.

Some of the corpsmen I've talked to about carrying a .45 have told me that they found it such a nuisance that they would get rid of it. Some others said they also found that a carbine would get in the way and wasn't worth it. It sounds like you were really glad to have your .45. Did you ever know a corpsman who decided that he would rather not carry a weapon because it was just too much to lug around?

Not front-line corpsmen. Never did I see a front-line corpsman in my outfit that didn't carry a weapon. They all carried weapons.

Did that mean a .45 and a carbine?

No. Most carried pistols. They weren't issued carbines. The only way you got one of those was to pick one up off the ground from someone who was wounded or killed. And a couple of boys did.

I had my .45. I wasn't too good with it at Cape Gloucester. But after that, I learned how to shoot it and at close range I could use it. The only time I ever drew it was when that boy got shot in the lips. But most of the time I used my carbine because I was better with it.

Everyone who was at Peleliu talks about the incredible heat.

It was 110 in the shade and there was no shade. It was extremely hot. We were about 5 or 6 degrees off the equator. And the humidity was humongous. And then it would rain. And we had no fresh water there. It was all contaminated.

I understand the water you brought with you was pretty bad.

The water they brought ashore in tanks, I believe had gasoline in it. It was just terrible and you couldn't drink it. The water you filled your canteens with aboard ship was good water, but any water you had to drink after those canteens were empty was putrid.

You had two canteens with you when you went ashore?

Yes.

How long did they last?

I don't remember. I do know that when a Marine was wounded you gave him water.

The heat was one thing, the coral was something else. Did you treat a lot of coral injuries?

You would get a lot of cuts and scratches, especially when the fellas would dive into someplace like a foxhole, or pile up pieces of coral around them to keep from getting hit.

When did you encounter your first Japanese?

A lot of dead ones but none face to face the first day. The first night they were about a hundred yards away from us. They came out to this point to get out into the water so they could infiltrate behind us. When the star shells went off somebody said, "There are the Japs out in the water!" So everybody, including yours truly with his carbine, started firing at the Japs in the water. There were 25 or 30 of them and they didn't last long, not with 300 guys shooting at them. That was about as near as I got to the Japanese.

Do you remember the first night? Did you get any sleep?

No sleep. The first night we were firing at the Japs, the second night we were up on top of the ridge in a foxhole, a hospital corpsmen and I. And one of our tanks was about 25 or 30 feet from us. You lay down a .45 in one hand and a carbine in the other. The star shells would go up and light up the whole area. The second night we had a machine gun about 20 or 30 feet to the right of us. And six or seven Japs infiltrated between that tank and my foxhole into that machine gun nest and bayonetted one of the boys. The machine gunner turned the .30 caliber machine gun on him and just let loose. The Jap's hands were practically cut completely off. That's how close the combat was that second night.

One of the things you didn't do at night was move. If you were a corpsman, you stayed put so if they needed you they could find you. The next morning, as soon as it got light... I went to where the boy was bayoneted. About 4 inches of his intestine was hanging out of his stomach. I gave him a shot of morphine and sent him back. By the way, he made it. He didn't die.

That was the first night. I don't remember too many details after that. It was just continual fighting for 10 or 12 days.

You didn't stay on the beach very long, did you?

There wasn't much inland to move to. It was only 2 x 7 miles. I would say a hundred yards to the ridge and then you went down another hundred yards and there was an airstrip. We moved about 75 or 100 yards the most that first day. The second day we moved up on top of the ridge overlooking the airfield. The Japs made a big mistake at noon by bringing out their tanks

to counterattack. When they did our aircraft blew most of them up. Our Navy fighters just creamed them.

The next few days was like being in a half-trance from lack of sleep and exposure to the intense heat and shellfire. Bodies torn, ripped, and burned beyond recognition seemed to be everywhere. The stench of burning, rotting bodies was unbearable and one you never forget.

How long were you on Peleliu all together?

About 28 days. After about 15 days we were relieved and moved up to the end of the island. We had mail call (see my picture on page 334 of The Old Breed. The next day I was swimming up when a guy stepped on me and I hollered at him. And it was Colonel Chesty [Lewis] Puller. When he looked at me I said, "I'm sorry Colonel." He said, "That's all right." This was on Peleliu and he had just lost his brother. He was really out of it. His uniform looked like it had been stuck by every piece of barbed wire on the island. He was a hard-nosed Marine, a Marine's Marine.

Did you have any close calls there?

Yes. One I remember quite well. One of our aerial bombs had made a nice big hole, a crater about 30-feet across. And we'd been living in there about 8 or 10 days when one of the sergeants asked me if I would go with him. They had a couple of caves to blow that morning. And said I would. There was an old gentlemen from Ohio named Pop Street living in that same hole with me off and on for 10 days. I said, "Pop, come on, let's get out of here, you need some exercise." So he came along. We had gotten no further than 300 yards, when mortar shells hit in our area. After we had blown the caves, we went back to our foxhole. It had sustained a dead-center hit and everything in it was destroyed. Evidently, one or two shells had hit right into that crater. So the old man said, "Doc, any time you want me to go with you, you tell me. I'm coming with you."

And I did have a charmed life, I guess. With all the firing and all the bullets flying, I was never wounded there at Peleliu. However, I did receive a minor wound at Cape Gloucester. I was talking to two Marines when the Japs opened up with a mortar attack. Three mortar shells hit about 20 yards from us. My back was facing the explosion. A fragment from one shell hit me between the shoulders. It was about 2 1/2 inches to 3 1/2 inches long and struck me flat. The four corners had points that pierced my back bringing blood to the surface. If it had hit me on its side, I might not be here to talk about it. It scorched my jacket, and the fellows said it burned my back. They said I earned a Purple Heart, but I didn't consider a few drops of blood sufficient to earn the medal, so I never told the doctor about it.

Do you remember leaving Peleliu?

We got back aboard ship and went back to Pavuvu. I think we went back on an LST. We ran into a typhoon and it took two plates off the port side just above the water line. Anyway, we got to Pavuvu for R&R. I got my orders to come back to the Navy. That was in December of '44. I boarded a ship and went back to San Francisco. I went to the receiving station at Treasure Island and got all new clothes, and a 30-day rehabilitation leave, and I went back home in February. Then I got orders to go to Patuxent River Naval Air Station. I was there until November and then went to Bainbridge where I was discharged on November 10, 1945.

You spent most of your Navy career with the Marine Corps. What do you remember most of all?

You just can't believe how devastating and how ferocious the war was. Once you had seen it, it just never would leave your mind because you could not believe that all that gunfire could go on and you could walk away from it without getting wounded or killed. Everywhere you looked guys were dead, bobbing in the water, half their body missing and head blown off. You cannot picture that kind of thing. As I mentioned before, if you haven't had an opportunity to see the uncut version of Peleliu taken by the photographers, it's something to see. They say we had 1,200 dead at Peleliu. I think I saw 1,200 dead the first few days.

It was all a sobering experience for a 19-year-old.

The fear of combat is something you never forget. You are frightened beyond all comprehension. But the first wounded man you see ends the sick feeling and duty overcomes most all fears. You become like a machine never thinking about yourself but always trying to save life where you can. Now all the things you learned back in hospital corps school are hurriedly put into practice. Bandaging, applying tourniquets, use of sulfa and administering morphine to stop shock is what you do.

After a few hours you become immune to the existing conditions and go through the ordeal as though you are in a trance. You never once falter, and your hands never fail to do the right thing in order to save the life you hold in your arms. The nearness of death is sickening to the point of nausea. You ask yourself why? What are we fighting and dying for? The answer to these and many other questions are left to the diplomats, military leaders, and are rarely ever answered.

Going on patrols is most dangerous. Shell fire, mortars, and sniper fire engulf you at every turn. Being pinned down by the enemy for long periods, never knowing whether the next bullet is for you makes a young boy of 19 or 20, old beyond his years.